

The Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act

Rep. Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR) and Rep. Jaime Herrera Beutler (R-WA)

Endorsements: 1,000 Days, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, Afterschool Alliance, Alliance to End Hunger, American Academy of Pediatrics, American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), American Federation of Teachers, American Heart Association, American Public Health Association, Association of State Public Health Nutritionists, Bipartisan Policy Center's Early Childhood Initiative, Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Bread for the World, CACFP Roundtable, Center for American Progress, Center for Law and Social Policy, Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), Child Care Aware® of America, Children's HealthWatch, Coalition on Human Needs, Community Child Care Council (4Cs), Feeding America, First Five Years Fund (FFYF), First Focus Campaign for Children, Food For Kids, Inc., Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), Generations United, KinderCare Education, National CACFP Forum, National CACFP Sponsors Association, National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), National Association For Family Child Care, National Education Association (NEA), National Farm to School Network, National Milk Producers Federation, National Women's Law Center, Nemours Children's Health, NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice, Premier, Inc., Public Health Institute, National Recreation and Parks Association, Oregon Food Bank, Save the Children, Services Employee International Union (SEIU), Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior, Trust for America's Health, and ZERO TO THREE

Summary

The Program:

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimburses child care centers, family child care homes, Head Start programs, afterschool programs, homeless shelters, and nonresidential adult day care centers for serving nutritious meals. Approximately 4.7 million children and 137,000 adults benefit each day from the program.

Meals served to children in participating child care centers and homes contain less fat and more nutrients than meals served in other facilities. Federal support for nutritious meals also help child care providers control costs that are typically passed on to families, helping make high quality child care accessible.

The Problem:

More than 15 million children in America experience food insecurity. Given the prevalence of food insecurity, as well as high rates of childhood obesity, there is a clear need to provide nutritious meals and instill healthy eating habits in child care settings.

Although meals served at CACFP-participating facilities improve food security, support good nutrition, and prevent obesity, the challenges of complying with the program have contributed to a more than 30 percent decline in children served by CACFP participating family child care homes. The participation rate from these providers dropped from more than 1 million children served at these homes in 1999 to less than 700,000 served at family day care homes in 2018.

The Legislation:

The Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act will strengthen CACFP's ability to serve low-income children. The bill allows the option of an additional meal or snack for children in care for a full day, reduces paperwork, streamlines program operations, and helps child care providers continue to operate effectively.

Provides reimbursements for an additional meal:

Currently, child care providers can be reimbursed for serving two meals and one snack; however, many working families rely on child care providers for full-day service. The bill authorizes reimbursements to child care providers who offer a third meal to children who are in their care for more than eight hours.

Streamlines reimbursement rates for child care providers:

Under current law, the federal government uses separate consumer price indexes to calculate adjustments for reimbursement rates for family child care homes and child care centers. Although the indexes were meant to reflect differences in prices for food served at home versus food served in a center, both groups of providers must follow the same meal requirements. The Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act eliminates complexity by authorizing a single formula for adjusting reimbursement rates for all child care providers in the program.

Reduces paperwork for parents and child care providers:

The Early Childhood Nutrition Improvement Act creates an expert advisory committee to make recommendations for using technology and reducing unnecessary paperwork and duplicative recordkeeping requirements for parents and providers.

Simplifies participation for proprietary centers:

For-profit child care centers are eligible to participate in the CACFP program if at least 25 percent of the children they serve are low-income. Many providers operate small child care centers and afterschool programs that offer care to low-income children in underserved areas, supporting early learning and allowing parents to work. Currently, these centers must certify eligibility each month, even though many are well above the 25-percent threshold. The bill would allow centers to certify eligibility annually, reducing the time and money spent on paperwork.

Clarifies the CACFP's requirements:

The bill requires the Department of Agriculture to review the rules of the CACFP and issue clearer guidelines so fewer child care providers accidentally violate the program's requirements. The bill also seeks to improve the process for correcting incidents of noncompliance, so providers acting in good faith are not terminated from the program.